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Gophers.

Prairie dogs and ground squirrels live in colonies. They are merry rodents. But the gopher burrows into the earth alone, and naturalists tell us that he is the most unamiable and vicious of the Sciuridae family. He lives a sad life, seldom coming to the surface, never gamboling over the green earth, never feeding on the fresh herbage or fruit, but only on the roots of vegetables and trees. A pamphlet, issued by the United States Department of Agriculture, says of him:

"The fierce disposition is just what might be expected from the solitary mode of life. From the time the young are half grown and big enough to start burrows of their own, each individual lives entirely alone, except during the short mating season in early spring. Living alone and in the dark for eleven months in the year, is not calculated to develop a lovable disposition. To the same causes—darkness and solitude—may also be attributed the gopher's small eyes and ears, narrow brain case and undeveloped voice."

A popular agricultural journal takes the gopher as a text, and preaches an excellent sermon on the importance of rural sociability. The tendency among American farmers is to locate on a quarter section. They buy all the land around it that they can, so as to have as few neighbors as possible, and the few as far off as possible. The result of this is a narrow, selfish life, and I do not wonder that the sons of such farmers are discontented and want to get into town. If we would make the country attractive, we must try to bring the farmers nearer together and make them more social. But how can this be done?

We have God's plan in the book of Joshua. When he brought the Hebrews out of Egypt and gave them possession of their promised land he made every man a freeholder. But the allotment of farms and vineyards was such that their owners could live together in villages, going out daily to cultivate their fields, and returning in the evening, so that they could meet in the market place. There were no tenants, and but little shifting of the population, for if a man sold his inheritance it came back to him or to his children in the year of jubilee. Our farmers ought to study this divine ideal, and conform to it as far and as fast as they can.

Interesting experiments in combining town and country are now being tried in the orchard regions of California. Where ten acres will support a family, fifty or sixty families can live on the same square mile, and can have their homes so near together that they can meet as easily as those who inhabit villages. Such a community can enjoy, with its pure country air, a great many social advantages. It can have a common reading room, weekly reunions, concerts, lyceums, etc. Life in such a rural village, with a homogeneous population, would be more healthful, intellectually and morally, than that of either city or country. It would combine many of the advantages of each, and avoid many of the evil tendencies of each.

Under no conditions could the rising generation be trained with better prospects for meeting the responsibilities of citizenship in a free land. One reason that the farming element has exerted so little political influence hitherto, is that the farmers have been so isolated. Let the motto be: Smaller farms more highly cultivated, and colonies of farmers or orchardists whose ideas are in harmony, and who can work together not only for their mutual improvement, but for the public good.

A great many of us must live in the country in order to raise food for those who live in towns and cities. We don't want to live like gophers. Hence we must try to change the old conditions as fast as we can and get together in rural communities.—Journal and Messenger.

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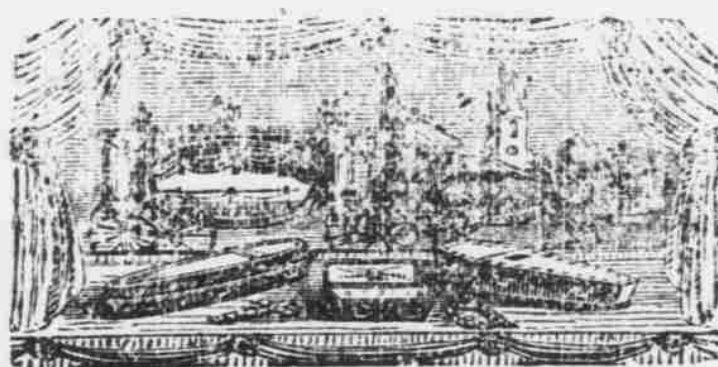
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